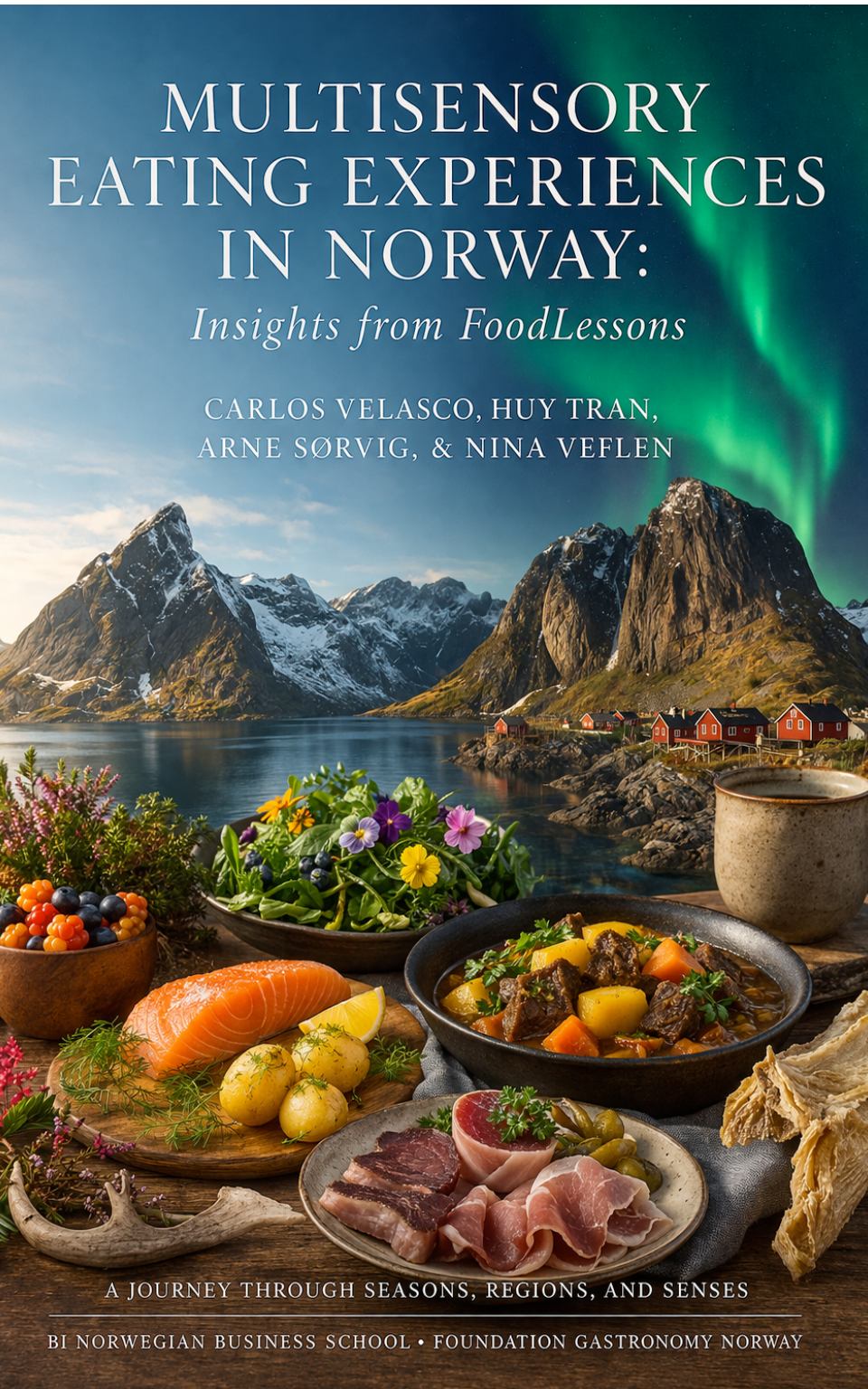
# MULTISENSORY EATING EXPERIENCES IN NORWAY:

## *Insights from FoodLessons*

CARLOS VELASCO, HUY TRAN,
ARNE SØRVIG, & NINA VEFLEN



A JOURNEY THROUGH SEASONS, REGIONS, AND SENSES

BI NORWEGIAN BUSINESS SCHOOL • FOUNDATION GASTRONOMY NORWAY

# Multisensory eating experiences in Norway: Insights from FoodLessons

Carlos Velasco, Huy Tran,
Arne Sørvig, & Nina Veflen

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# DEDICATION

To all those shaping the culinary landscapes of Norway, whose work brings the multisensory experiences of this country to life.

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Last but not least, we warmly thank BI Norwegian Business School and Foundation Gastronomy Norway (frmr. Bocuse d'Or Norge) for their support and collaboration. Your commitment to culinary excellence and educational innovation has been instrumental in the development and dissemination of the work presented herein.

# PREFACE

This book is the culmination of our work on the multisensory strand of FoodLessons, a national research initiative funded by the Research Council of Norway (2021-2024). Our work was conducted under Work Package 3, which explored the experiential dimensions of Norwegian gastronomy and food networks for value creation. Drawing on perspectives from the senses, culture, and food practice, we set out to explore what shapes eating experiences in Norway, from fjord to forest, across seasons, and between tradition and innovation.

Norwegian food culture is in many ways a culture of adaptation: to landscape, to light, and to seasonal scarcity. What began as subsistence, salting, fermenting, curing, and drying to outlast the long winters, has evolved into a cuisine deeply expressive of place, heritage, and identity. Through experimental work, field research, interviews, and multisensory design, we investigated how these environmental and cultural forces are perceived, remembered, and reinterpreted through the senses.

This book brings together what we observed and what we learned on how the sensory elements of Norwegian cuisine, its colours, textures, smells, sounds, and flavours, interact with broader affective, social, and ecological dimensions. From the evocative nostalgia of autumn meals and the visual clarity of summer produce to the sensory symbolism embedded in Northern Sámi food traditions, each chapter seeks to offer insights into what makes eating in Norway not just a matter of taste, but a multisensory encounter.

We have worked alongside chefs, producers, scholars, and consumers to chart this terrain. Their knowledge and lived experience have informed our understanding of how food can serve not only as sustenance, but also as a medium for storytelling, cultural continuity, and place-making. This book offers new ways of thinking about multisensory food experiences while also offering ideas for chefs, producers, designers, and anyone shaping food experiences in Norway.

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Oslo, 2026

# 1 INTRODUCTION TO MULTISENSORY EXPERIENCES

Imagine a typical day in your life, where you're about to enjoy a meal in a restaurant, nothing fancy, just an everyday dining experience. You might think it's just routine, lacking excitement or significance. But what if we told you that even the simplest of dining moments is, as a matter of fact, an extraordinary journey through your senses? (Velasco, Petit, & Veflen, 2025).

Let us begin with the menu, not merely a list of offerings, but a crafted artefact designed to engage the visual imagination. Carefully selected words, typefaces, and imagery construct a narrative that shapes initial expectations and stirs curiosity. Yet anticipation is not built on textual or visual cues alone. The presence of front-of-house staff plays a crucial, often underappreciated, role in shaping the sensory and affective contours of the experience. The attire of the waitstaff, their manner of speaking, the degree of formality or informality they exhibit, and the tone, cadence, and warmth of their voice all contribute to a multisensory prelude to the meal. Their embodied conduct conveys trust, competence, and attentiveness, thereby modulating emotional readiness and influencing perception. This brief but significant moment of coexistence between guest and server becomes a sensory exchange in itself, priming expectations and amplifying the

perceived value of the food to come. As the dish arrives, it is not simply a vehicle for nutrition, but the culmination of a (sometimes) choreographed anticipatory sequence, made vivid through visual presentation, olfactory cues, and the resonance of human interaction.

You decide how to indulge in this culinary adventure, with your hands, chopsticks, fork and knife, or any other preferred method. Each choice brings a unique touch to the experience, adding an extra layer of sensory engagement. As you take that first bite, multiple flavours interact on the palate. It's not just taste; it's a combination of taste, smell, and texture coming together in harmony. What is more, every sense has a role to play, making this ordinary meal extraordinary.

Multisensory food experiences are not just limited to dining out. Think about your daily interactions with food, selecting fresh produce at the market, preparing a home-cooked meal, or indulging in your favourite comfort food. Each step of the way, your senses are in action, guiding your expectations and choices, and influencing your experience.

The visual cues of colour and shape can affect your expectations and perceptions of food. The vibrant colours of fruits and vegetables in the market entice you to pick the ripest and most appealing ones. The shape of a dish can hint at its taste profile, setting the stage for the culinary experience to come. Sound also plays a role in this multisensory symphony, though it has been described as the forgotten flavour sense. The ambiance of the environment, the gentle background music, the appearance and tone of voice of the waiters, or the lively chatter of fellow diners can enhance or alter your perception of the meal. The sound of sizzling in the kitchen or the clinking of glasses adds an extra layer of enjoyment to the experience.

Touch is another crucial element in this sensory journey. The texture of the food as you bite into it, the warmth of a freshly brewed cup of coffee, or the refreshing coolness of a

scoop of ice cream, all these tactile sensations enrich the culinary adventure. And let's not forget about smell, a sense that profoundly influences flavour perception, whether through the nose (orthonasal olfaction) or the mouth (retronasal olfaction). The aroma of freshly baked bread, the earthy scent of a bowl of soup, or the fragrant spices in a dish all contribute to your overall sensory experience.

The multisensory nature of eating experiences doesn't end there. It extends beyond the senses of sight, taste, smell, touch, and sound. Our eating experiences are influenced by a myriad of factors, including the ambiance and environment surrounding us. The soft lighting in a cozy restaurant casts a warm glow, immersing you in an intimate dining experience. The decor and setting evoke emotions, creating a sense of place that enhances your enjoyment.

Moreover, multisensory experiences are not exclusive to upscale dining establishments. Everyday moments offer their own magic. A leisurely breakfast with a loved one, a picnic in the park, or exploring street food in a bustling market, each of these can be a rich multisensory experiences, that are often remembered after the meal.

The multisensory nature of eating experiences also extends to the cultural and regional differences that shape our culinary journeys. Different regions and cultures celebrate the bounty of each season with unique dishes that capture the essence of nature's cycle. From vibrant spring salads to hearty winter stews, the flavours reflect the changing landscape and create a sense of time and tradition.

Beyond the confines of traditional dining, innovative culinary creators are designing immersive multisensory experiences that deliberately blur the lines between perception and reality. Imagine a dessert that arrives shrouded in a cloud of aromatic mist, its ephemeral presence conjuring a dreamlike ambience even before the first bite. Or consider a dish that playfully subverts expectations by mimicking the form of a

familiar staple, yet confounds with unexpected textures and flavours, such as a scallop that visually replicates the familiar mollusc but, upon tasting, reveals itself as a delicate crust encasing a vibrant stew of fresh green peas. These culinary interventions operate as sensory and cognitive provocations, destabilising the assumed relationship between appearance and taste. The resulting dissonance does not diminish the experience but rather enriches it, encouraging diners to reflect on what they are tasting where surprise, curiosity, and delight converge. Through such tactics, chefs engage not only the palate but the mind, forging experiences that are as intellectually stimulating as they are sensorially rewarding.

The next time you sit down to eat, attend to the full symphony of sensations that unfolds around you. Savour each bite with intention, let the aromas stir memory and emotion, and appreciate the visual and tactile artistry on the plate. Eating is not merely an act of nourishment, but an immersive, multisensory experience. Step into this rich terrain with curiosity and openness, and you may find that each meal becomes not just a moment of consumption, but a journey into sensory imagination.

Multisensory eating experiences emphasise the deep interconnection between nature, culture, and cuisine, varying, to a certain degree, from country to country, each infused with its own distinct traditions, environments, and sensory attributes. In Italy, for instance, a meal is enhanced by the vibrant colours of fresh tomatoes and basil and the sounds of lively conversation. In Japan, the quiet precision of sushi preparation and the visual arrangement of the dishes contribute profoundly to the dining experience. This cultural variance invites diners to explore a palette of flavours, aromas, and textures that tell a story of the locale's heritage and culinary artistry.

As we consider how these concepts apply to a country like Norway, the focus might shift to the sensory experiences of dining in the presence of nature, such as enjoying freshly

caught fish with the sound of a fjord lapping in the background or savouring wild berries and game meat amid the quiet of a snowy landscape. These elements uniquely compose the Norwegian eating experience, integrating the breath-taking natural beauty of the country into every meal, thereby elevating the act of dining to an art form in itself (see Figure 1.1). But what precisely makes Norwegian eating experiences distinctive as a multisensory phenomenon? Across our research, three features recur consistently: the tension between hyper-fresh and heavily preserved, the deep integration of natural environment into sensory expectation, and a food culture that varies more by region than by any national norm. These three features, taken together, set Norwegian eating apart from most European food cultures, and they run as threads through every chapter of this book.

Figure 1.1. Geirangerfjord, a UNESCO World Heritage Site nestled in Norway's Sunnmøre region, is celebrated for its soaring cliffs, veiled waterfalls, and mirror-like waters, capturing the essence of the West Norwegian fjord landscape in its most awe-inspiring form. Photo credit: Carlos Velasco.

# 2 SEASONAL SAVOURS: A JOURNEY THROUGH NORWAY'S FOOD SENSORY SYMPHONY

Norway, a land of stunning landscapes and a rich cultural heritage, offers a unique and captivating multisensory journey through its eating experiences. As the seasons change, so do the sensory delights that accompany the culinary adventures in this picturesque country (see Figure 2.1). In a recent study, we explored how different sensory dimensions influence country-specific eating experiences throughout the seasons in Norway (Tran et al., 2023). Let's dive deeper into the results and the sensory elements that unfold across the seasons and explore how the senses play a key role in shaping Norwegian eating experiences.

Figure 2.1. Seasonal changes in Skøyen, Oslo, Norway. Photo credit: Carlos Velasco.

**Seasonal sensations in Norway**

Like other countries far from the equator, Norway experiences four distinct seasons: summer, autumn, spring, and winter. Each season brings its own sensory palette to the dining table, influencing not only the flavours but also the ambiance and overall experience of enjoying a meal. In the first part of the aforesaid study, we asked a group of 104 Norwegian participants to evaluate how different senses were engaged across the seasons in the context of typical eating experiences in Norway (see Figure 2.2 for a summary). Importantly, participants were instructed to focus not on the

food itself, but on the broader multisensory elements surrounding eating, including the setting, social context, and emotional tone. Their responses reveal that seasonal variation shapes the sensory qualities associated with eating, with significant effects across all senses except touch.

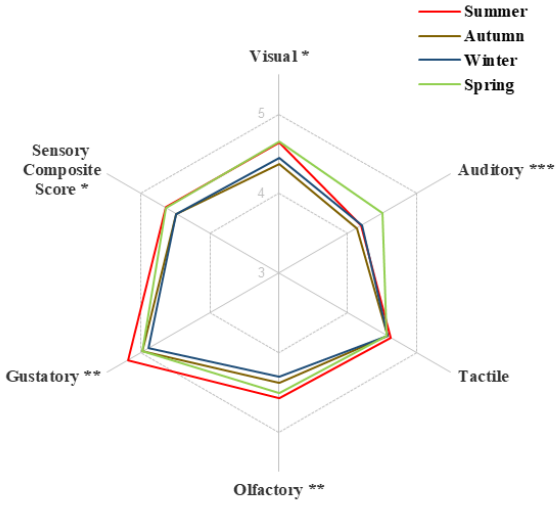


Figure 2.2. Figure reproduced from Tran, H., Veflen, N., Reinoso-Carvalho, F., Tabassum, F., & Velasco, C. (2023). Seasonal multisensory eating experiences in Norway and Colombia. *Food Quality and Preference, 109,* 104873.https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2023.104873. This article is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

During the warmer months of spring and summer, the country comes alive with vibrant colours and joyful outdoor activities. Norwegian eating experiences become deeply intertwined with the visual and sensorial beauty of nature, as the landscape bursts into lush greens, delicate blossoms, and the glow of the midnight sun. In the second part of the study, we asked participants about specific sensory associations

related to each of the seasons in the context of typical eating experiences in Norway. Figure 2.3 shows a summary of colours associated with eating experiences in each season. The sight of fresh produce, drawn from the bountiful seas and from lands that, though limited in extent, are notably fertile, enhances the multisensory appreciation of meals.

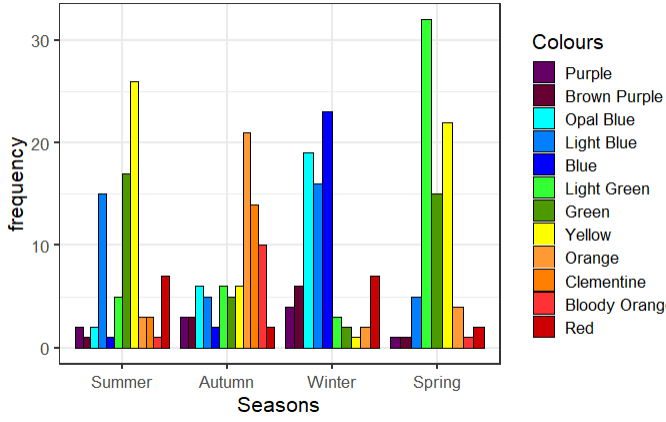


Figure 2.3. Colour associations with eating experiences in Norway. Figure reproduced from Tran, H., Veflen, N., Reinoso-Carvalho, F., Tabassum, F., & Velasco, C. (2023). Seasonal multisensory eating experiences in Norway and Colombia. *Food Quality and Preference, 109,* 104873. This article is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Historically, Norwegian agriculture prioritised a few high-volume staples, and it was not until the emergence of the New Nordic Cuisine movement that the subtle richness of the soil and forest floor was revalued by a wider community of chefs, and again their diners and over time a wider society, for its ability to yield early-season delicacies. These primører, the first vegetables, herbs, and shoots of spring, are increasingly celebrated in Norwegian gastronomy. Their sweet, concentrated flavours capture a fleeting biological youth: miniature carrots, pale green nettles before they mature and toughen, wild ramson, the Nordic garlic, and the first tender

leaves of cabbage and lettuce all exemplify this seasonal magic. As the light returns and nature awakens, dining shifts outdoors. Terraces, gardens, and open-air spaces become preferred settings, allowing people to savour food in harmony with the crisp air and radiant light of the northern spring.

As autumn sets in and winter blankets the land in snow, the sensory journey takes a different turn. The colours shift to colder tones of deep reds, oranges, and browns, reflecting the changing foliage and the anticipation of the coming winter. Norwegian eating experiences in winter and autumn become cosier and more intimate, with restaurants and homes adorned with candles and warm lighting, creating a sense of hygge (cosiness). Warm comfort foods, such as hearty stews, creamy soups, and hot beverages like mulled wine and hot chocolate, take centre stage, providing a sense of comfort and well-being during the colder months.

Norwegian eating experiences in winter and autumn often evoke feelings of nostalgia, as cherished memories of holiday gatherings and festive meals resurface. While inland traditions tend to emphasise hearty stews, baked goods, and warm beverages, coastal regions, particularly in the west and north, are distinguished by an abundance of seasonal seafood, with many species reaching their prime during the colder months. Dishes such as fish stews and seafood soups bridge these culinary expressions, uniting warmth and seasonality across regional lines. In this context, blue evokes not only the ocean and icy landscapes, but also the crisp skies above snow-covered scenes, deepening the sensory resonance of winter dining in Norway. Apart from Christmas season, autumn is probably the season where established traditions abound related to the sweet root vegetables in season, mushrooms, shellfish, arctic shrimps, coastal cod, halibut, game meat and lamb.

**A symphony of senses**

Norwegian eating experiences engage all the senses, creating a multisensory combination shaping the eating experience. In Figure 2.4, we present a summary of sensory and affective words associated with each sense as a function of season in Norway, reported by the participants of the second part of the study. The sense of taste is indulged with a variety of flavours, from the fresh seafood of the coastal regions to the rich and savoury dishes of the inland areas. Whether it's the delicate sweetness of freshly picked berries or the smoky richness of grilled salmon, Norwegian cuisine celebrates the natural essence of each ingredient.

What distinguishes this from, say, Colombian eating experiences, where the same seasonal study was conducted, is that Norwegian sensory associations cluster around restraint and nature rather than vibrancy and sociality. The Norwegian summer palette is fresh and light; the winter palette is intimate and preservative. This is not merely a climatic accident but reflects a food culture that has historically valued making the most of what little each season offers.

Figure 2.4. Summary diagram of sensory and affective words relating to eating experiences in Norway. Figure reproduced from Tran, H., Veflen, N., Reinoso-Carvalho, F., Tabassum, F., & Velasco, C. (2023). Seasonal multisensory eating experiences in Norway and Colombia. *Food Quality and Preference, 109,* 104873.This article is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

The aroma of traditional Norwegian delicacies fills the air, enticing the appetite and evoking memories of family gatherings and celebrations. The smoky aroma of grilled lamb or pork, the sweet scent of freshly baked cinnamon buns, the purity of a fresh cheese and the earthy aroma of reindeer stew all contribute to the sensory feast. In some regions, the air is perfumed with the distinctive smell of cured fish, such as boknafisk and rakfisk, fermented fish that are considered delicacies. At many farms you can still experience the sweet smell of curing meats, in pure formats like ham, fenalår (cured leg of lamb) and reindeer hearts to more elaborated types like sausages flavoured with what the seasons provide, marinated,

salted or smoked before curing.

The sense of touch plays a crucial role in Norwegian eating experiences, as textures and temperatures shift in tandem with the seasons. During spring and summer, meals often emphasise lighter, glossier textures, featuring fresh berries, crisp vegetables, and delicate sauces. These seasons coincide with the availability of species such as mackerel and herring, while shellfish like crab provide a pleasing contrast of firm and tender textures. autumn introduces more robust, velvety consistencies, particularly in the consumption of shellfish, which are considered at their peak during this period.

In winter, firmer, denser textures prevail, exemplified by dishes featuring Skrei, the seasonal Atlantic migratory cod prized for its firm, flaky flesh. While the overarching aim of this work is to explore multisensory sensations rather than catalogue ingredients, attentiveness to seasonality helps avoid cultural incongruities. Moreover, in light of the research programme's connection to the agricultural sector, such contextual sensitivity also reflects a respectful engagement with local foodways and traditions.

In contrast, winter and autumn are associated with heartier and warmer sensations, as dishes incorporate rich gravies, roasted meats, and hearty root vegetables. The contrasting textures of tender meats and robust vegetables provide a sensory journey that delights the palate. For adventurous food lovers, Norway's cultural heritage includes delicacies like smalahove, a dish made from sheep's head, which offers a unique and unforgettable textural experience.

Sound also plays a part in the sensory symphony of Norwegian eating experiences. The sounds of nature, such as the chirping of birds, the rustling of leaves, and the gentle lapping of waves, create a harmonious backdrop to the meal, enhancing the overall ambiance and connection with the surroundings. In restaurants, ambient music is often carefully chosen to complement the dining experience, setting the

mood and adding an extra layer of sensory pleasure.

**Embracing the seasons in Norwegian gastronomy**

Norwegians have a deep connection with nature, and this is reflected in their eating experiences. The changing seasons not only influence the flavours and ingredients used in dishes but also shape the overall perception of the meal. Chefs and restaurateurs in Norway understand the power of sensory engagement and use it to craft unforgettable dining experiences.

Seasonal menus are a hallmark of Norwegian gastronomy, foregrounding dishes that reflect the rhythms of the natural environment and highlight the best of each season's bounty. In summer, freshly caught mackerel may be pan-fried and served with sour cream, while autumn features wild salmon and trout, game meats, foraged mushrooms, and traditional fare such as fårikål, a comforting lamb and cabbage stew emblematic of the season. The primary lamb season runs from August to October, yet lamb also features prominently during Easter celebrations, typically prepared in fresh form from frozen legs. spring dishes tend to showcase tender, sweet spring vegetables and herbs in fresh salads, reflecting renewal and delicacy. In winter, robust stews and oven-baked fish such as Skrei (cod) help keep the cold at bay. Every detail in these seasonal offerings, from ingredient provenance to presentation, is carefully curated according to habits from tradition that heighten the multisensory experience, while also anchoring it in local culinary culture.

Moreover, the dining settings themselves embrace the seasons, with restaurants and cafes adapting their ambiance and decor to match the changing landscape outside. Outdoor seating areas are popular in summer and spring, while cosy interiors with warm lighting create an inviting atmosphere during the colder months. Norwegian eating experiences are about more than just the food; they are about immersing oneself in the beauty of the surroundings and embracing the

rhythms of nature. A visit to a better, independent restaurant is so much more than satisfying hunger, it is a meal that offers an escape and a break from the daily routine, jam packed with sensory elements each diner perceives, consciously or not.

**In conclusion**

Norwegian eating experiences are a delightful multisensory journey through the changing seasons. From the visual feast of colours and landscapes to the tantalising aromas and comforting textures, every sense is engaged in this culinary adventure.

# 3 TASTE THE RAINBOW: A SENSORY FUSION OF NORWEGIAN EATING EXPERIENCES

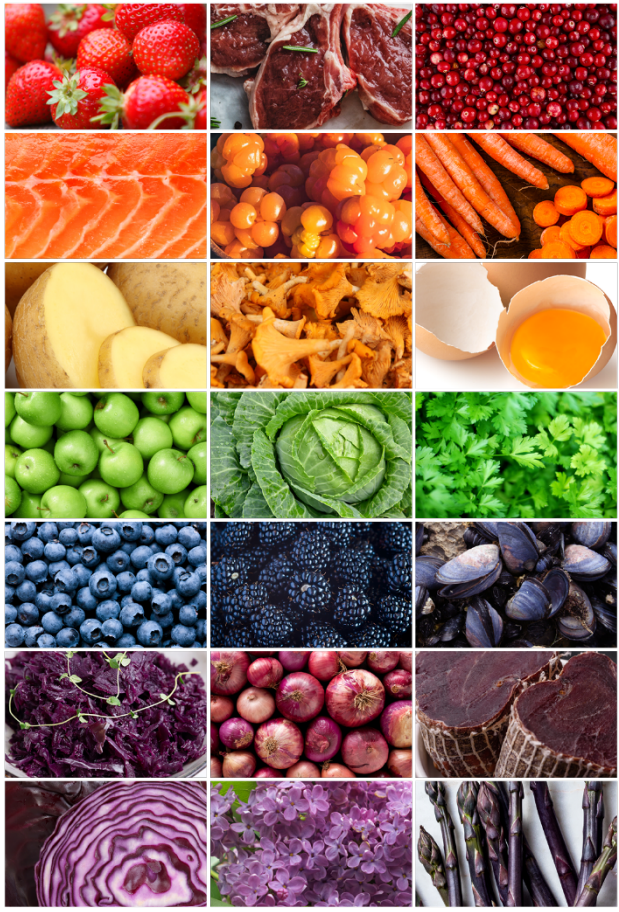

Figure 3.1. The rainbow of Norwegian produce. Figure credit: All images used in this figure are royalty-free and sourced from Getty Images (https://summer.gettyimages.com/, see endnote 1 for all specific links where the images come from).

Different countries have different food cultures, some more distinct and easy to remember than others. What we eat, when we eat, and how we eat varies from country to country

and sometimes even within a country (see Figure 3.1, for a sample of Norwegian produce). If I say pizza, dinner at 22:00 and chop sticks, different countries, like Italy, Spain and China, might pop up in your mind. But what do we associate with a Norwegian food culture? Are there any specific dishes, any meal habits, or any unique eating rituals in Norway? After interviewing chefs, food manufacturers, food researchers and consumers in Norway, we claim that the answer is yes. Not only dishes and habits but also sensory specific cues, such as specific pictures, sounds, smells, textures and tastes, come to mind when thinking of Norwegian eating experiences. Below, we dive into the peculiarities of Norwegian eating experiences.

Let us start with a little history. Life in Norway used to be much tougher than today. Before the 1800s, ordinary people in Norway, as in many other countries in Europe, lived close to starvation, although this varied regionally, with coastal towns and trading centres showing greater food availability and access to imported goods. winters were challenging, age was counted in winters survived, and food was first of all nourishment. Access to food varied with the seasons and a cauldron over the fireplace was used to heat up porridge and stews (Norgeshistorie.no).

> "Our food culture has been characterized by sustainability and innovation. We were poor, there were short seasons, and it was all about making the food last longer. Food waste didn't exist. …our philosophy was very much characterized by gratitude, reverence, frugality, austerity, and we were incredibly innovative in making the food last" (Norwegian Chef, Tran et al., 2024)

To secure food supply for the winter, fish and meat were salted, dried, smoked, fermented, marinated and frozen, fruits and berries were boiled with sugar, and potatoes were stored

dark in the basement. The canning industry became big fast in Norway. First sardines, then fish balls (a classic Norwegian dish made from minced white fish, flour, eggs, and milk) and different types of ready to eat meals like lapskaus and sodd, were hermetically sealed and sold in tins (Hviding, 2002). Almost every raw material was utilized, from cod tongue to sheep head, from mackerel skin to pork ear, from nose to tail and blood to bone. The combination of processing and raw material resulted in some peculiar dishes, some which have developed into traditional Norwegian specialities.

**Traditions and peculiarities**

> "The [food] philosophy in Norway, if you compare it with Sweden, is place-bound. There are traditions that are more strongly linked to the various regions in Norway, which you can also see in France and Italy. I feel it is stronger in Norway than in the other Nordic countries" (Swedish Chef, Tran et al., 2024)

Pinnekjøtt is a traditional western Norway dish, now often eaten at Christmas all over the country. After a long summer walking freely around in the hilly west-coast nature the lambs are slaughtered, and the ribs salted, dried, and sometimes smoked to keep. When preparing pinnekjøtt, the dried ribs are put into water for 24 hours, before steamed on birch sticks, and served with boiled potatoes and rutabaga stew.

Smalahove is another peculiar Western Norway dish. Half the head of a sheep split in two from nose to neck is, as pinnekjøtt, served with potatoes and rutabaga stew (Figure 3.2). Smalahove is not a common dish anymore. It is more a social and fun eating experience, more of a ritual where the toughest even eat the eyes, often followed by large amounts of beer and aquavit (traditional Scandinavian distilled spirit from grain or potatoes flavoured with a variety of herbs). In some places the traditions are nurtured and kept, like in the mountainous west coast city of Voss where there is even an

entire annual festival dedicated to "Smalahove".

Figure 3.2. Western Norway: Pinnekjøtt and Smalahove. Photo credit: Matprat/ Sara Johannessen.

Klippfisk, salted and dry cured cod, is a western Norway fish specialty. Traditionally the fish, often cod, was laid out on the rocks (in Norwegian "klipp") to dry after two to four weeks of salt curing. Saltfisk is salt cured fish without drying, while Tørrfisk, or stockfisk, is dried without salting until it becomes dry as a piece of wood (stock = stokk, a piece of wood in Norwegian language). These traditional dried and

salted Norwegian fish products (Klippfisk, saltfisk and tørrfisk) is now exported all over the world. Rumour has it, back in the days before drying clipfish could be done indoors at scale, that when you stood on the top of Aksla, a mountain top in the middle of Ålesund, a town on the west coast of Norway, you could see 90% of the klippfisk production in the world. Each of these dried and salted fish products has its national markets. While the klippfisk (Bacalhau) is exported to Portugal, Brazil and Dominican Republic, the saltfisk (Bacalao) goes to Spain, France and Mexico. In Italy and Nigeria, the tørrfisk is known as Stoccafisso. This export intensive fishery industry has had a strong impact on coastal cultures from Bergen to Kirkenes for hundreds of years.

Bacalhau, bacalao and stoccafisso are all salted and/or dried fish products, which are made into hundreds, if not thousands of different dishes based on the customer's own local food culture. Although some state that the invention of the salted and dried fish product category originated from Basque, Portugese and French fishermen in Newfoundland, Kurlansky claims that these products were invented much earlier by the Nordic vikings (Kurlansky, 1998, p.27).

Since the Vatican recommends not eating meat during fasting, these fish products still play a major role in all catholic food cultures. In Brazil, Portugal, and the Dominican Republic Bacalhau is a must for Easter (Figure 3.3). In other countries these dishes are a daily feast (Kongo and Jamaica) or Christmas food (Mexico) (https://summer.seafood.no/). This is a good example of how traditions and history colour the sensation of a product and a place even in today's meal experiences.

Figure 3.3. Northern Norway: Klippfish/ Bacalhau/Bacalao produce and one of the many dishes made from it. Photo credit: Norges sjømatråd/ Studio Dreyer Hensley

Northern Norway is rural and sparsely populated, with a tough arctic climate and a relatively limited agri-food growth. Northern Norway is part of the core area of the Sámi people, and their reindeer herding traditions have made reindeer meat an important part of the food traditions of the north. Still today reindeer stew, Bidos, is served on special occasions, like at Sámi weddings and on the Sámi National Day on 6th of February. Bidos is reindeer meat boiled in a big pot of reindeer broth together with carrots and potatoes (Figure 3.4). Cloudberry-cream is a typical regional dessert. Cloudberries are the "gold of the Northern plains and mountains", and families have their secret places for picking them. The handpicked berries are for the traditional version boiled with sugar and stirred into whipped cream. Simple and delicious.

Figure 3.4. Northern Norway: Bidos and cloudberry cream. Photo credit: Matprat / Esten Borgos; Matprat/ Mari Scenningsen.

Inland in Eastern Norway rakfisk is one of the traditional dishes (Figure 3.5). Small wild or cultivated freshwater trout (preferably 500 g.), fished late summer, were traditionally mildly salted after gutting and layered belly up, stored under pressure, in tight containers at low temperature for 3-12 months (Skåra et al. 2015). To secure the right temperature (3-7 degrees C) in old times without refrigerators the containers were often stored in earth stone cellars or in holes dug in the ground. A natural fermentation process resulted in a tasty (although smelly) fish for the winter that was consumed raw with lefse (a traditional soft flat potato bread), biled almon potato, butter, fresh onions, sour cream and other accompaniments depending on local traditions (red beets, chopped hardboiled eggs, red onions, leek, flatbrød…). Other peculiarities for this region are cured game, mooseburgers and sour cream porridge.

Figure 3.5. Inland Norway: Rakfisk, mooseburger and sour cream porridge. Photo credit: Matprat/ Sara Johannessen, Matprat/ Mari Svenningsen, Matprat/ Mari Scenningsen.

Nationally people will often point out meat balls and fårikål as typical traditional Norwegian dishes (Figure 3.6). Both dishes strongly influenced from continental food cultures. Meat balls are minced beef made into balls, not so different from the Swedes "Kjøttbullar", Turkish "køfte" and the Greeks "Keftedes", although with less herbs than the latter. The meat balls are fried, boiled in broth and served in in a brown sauce based on browned butter, flour and broth, and traditionally served with boiled potatoes, lingonberry jam and a cabbage or pea stew. For Christmas, "Pork Ribs" is the most frequently consumed dish in southeast Norway, while the cured lamb rib "Pinnekjøtt" is most common on the southwest coast, and boiled cod and halibut is more frequent for Christmas in the north.

The pork ribs are oven roasted and served with potatoes, sour cabbage and lingonberry jam, often together with both variety of sausages and meat balls, both of pork meat. Farmed pigs were slaughtered for Christmas to make the holiday into a feast with enormous amounts of heavy food, yet it was such a rear occurrence that all parts were regarded as noble parts and saved for later or for trade. Nevertheless, the noblest parts were sold and the farmers families turned the less noble ribs

and meat destined for mince into what is regarded as the most important meal during the year: Christmas eve dinner.

Figure 3.6. Traditional Norwegian dishes: Meatballs in brown sauce, fårikål, Christmas Pork Rib. Photo credit: Matprat/ Sara Johannessen.

One of Norway's national dishes, Fårikål, is made from fresh or frozen sheep/lamb meat boiled for hours in layers with cabbage, spiced with whole black pepper. It is traditionally served in the autumn, right after the slaughtering. This is a dish evoking fond memories, even perceived a clear sign that the autumn has come, for many Norwegians.

> "Now we're about to enter the "fårikål" season. If you walk around in Norway, pass by houses, you can smell "fårikål". And it creates great memories of a delicious family dinner of "fårikål". It's based on a very simple recipe based on two ingredients we have plenty of in Norway, cabbage and lamb. Together they create a larger unity". (Norwegian Chef, Tran et al., 2024)

Although voted Norway's' national dish by Norwegian consumers, Fårikål is a dish inspired by the continental kitchen. Many countries have similar dishes. But different countries have different raw materials. While the Danes for instance had goose and duck, Norway had sheep in abundance. While they made duck in cabbage, we made sheep

in cabbage.

> "In various countries, you use what you have available. And we got that dish from France via Denmark and in Denmark they had a lot of duck and goose. We didn't have that in Norway, we had sheep and then it became "får i kål" [Sheep in cabbage]. (Norwegian Researcher)

Matpakke is another typical Norwegian peculiarity (Figure 3.7). While every example above is dinner related and food consumed with knife and fork, most meals in Norway are eaten with the fingers. Both breakfast, lunch and evening food often consist of open sandwiches. For school, kids bring their own lunch in a matpakke. Although less than before, many bring such a lunch bag also for work. A typical matpakke consist of two slices of bread, often with cheese or ham, wrapped in paper, kept in the backpack until lunch time around noon.

Figure 3.7. Norwegian matpakke. Photo credit: Matprat/ Mari Scenningsen.

The statement below from a food researcher, gives a peak into one Norwegian household. It illustrates how bread and lunch

bags still are a part of Norwegians daily life. Things have changed over time. Now both parents most often work full time and there is less time to make elaborate dinners during the week. The traditional *matpakke* remains a stable and widely practised institution, particularly given the absence of school canteens, and continues to be culturally valued. While Norwegians eat less at restaurants than the European average, preparing proper food at home and sharing meals remains particularly important during weekends.

> "[At breakfast] a quick slice of bread, while I stand making them [lunch bags]. And then I also make myself lunch that I take to work. There I also eat slices of bread and if I don't do it, I eat at work, in the canteen, and then I always want a salad. I think quite a few women opt for that when they eat at work, while men will often go for the dinner version, I think. Which is also usually offered.
>
> Then my daughter and I eat [dinner], we have one child who lives with me. She is an adult but not moved away from home yet. She lives here for the time being and then we make some kind of dinner at six o'clock maybe. And then we are at the level of food box home delivery. We get a package with ingredients and a recipe delivered at home, so I make the dish that is provided by them. Otherwise, I think that the daily food that we eat now, it is more characterized by fast food than I was used to from childhood. But that is because we are much busier. If I get take-away, it will typically be pizza or Thai food or Indian or something like that.
>
> I don't spend that much time cooking everyday-food. But if I invite people to dinner, I like to spend a long time on it. And we like to do it together too. It is in a way a social part about

> cooking together and eating together and having fun together. I think that is quite typical for almost all Norwegians. I was in Paris for a weekend and then I went out to eat there, of course, and I think it shows that they are more used to eating out than Norwegians, still. I saw that we eat more at home in Norway compared to what is common in Europe." (Norwegian Researcher)

Taken together, these practices illustrate a food culture shaped by constraint, adaptation, and strong regional traditions, but also one increasingly exposed to new influences and expectations. The question, then, is not only what Norwegians eat, but how these historical practices are reinterpreted in contemporary contexts. This shift becomes particularly visible in the role of chefs and the translation of professional food values into everyday life.

**The chef's legacy: Shaping the future of home cooking**

Although contemporary Norwegian eating practices differ from traditional cuisine, these traditions continue to shape how food is understood, not least through chefs who reinterpret them across restaurants and, increasingly, the home. When people were asked what they associate with a typical Norwegian eating experience today, they described it in terms of vision, sound, smell, touch, and taste. The result is a fusion of sensory impressions, where tradition and contemporary influences coexist. This fusion is most clearly expressed through the senses, which provide a lens for understanding how these influences are perceived and integrated.

*Vision*

The sensory image of the Norwegian eating experience

brings forward diverse associations that linked to both traditional and modern Norwegian cuisine, to simple homemade and refined restaurant dishes and to Norwegian nature, agricultural landscape, and seasonality.

> "The visual aspect of local food has improved dramatically from ten years ago. If you bought Norwegian local food, ten years ago, it was grey and boring, while now, when thinking about a restaurant plate it seems that people are much better at making it visually delicate and in a way to put on something colourful or something that gives it a yes." (Norwegian researcher)

The perception of how Norwegian food should look has changed significantly over time. Traditional Norwegian food often brings forward images of monocoloured, visually boring and uninspiring dishes, such as white fish in white sauce, brown meat balls in brown sauce and a lump of meat on mashed potatoes. In contrast, the modern Norwegian cuisine is often associated with "aesthetical awareness", "colourful compositions", "touch of something that makes it look nice", "wonderful", "beautiful", "visually delicate" and "natural, with high respect of ingredients". These marks a gradual shift from the traditional Norwegian food that simply features meat or fish with potatoes, some root vegetables, and always some kind of simple sauce to the modern Norwegian restaurant cuisine that often comes with artistical displays to show respect to ingredients.

> "But in the last 20 years, a revolution has really taken place, on the professional side. Let's say you went back 25-30 years, you were focused on European food, it should have European names, you would like to import the produce. Everything that came from abroad was much better. This has turned around now- If you visit some of the best chefs around Norway, they will

> all say exactly the same thing. They are extremely satisfied with Norwegian ingredients and they seek out local producers. They want local food. They want food with a story. This has changed enormously. And at the same time, we've got a new Nordic cuisine that has made itself very visible in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Iceland. A modern way of thinking about food, different, a little out of the box, but incredibly exciting." (Norwegian chef)

While the Norwegian restaurant cuisine has embraced the modern approach which focuses more on the artistical aspect. The Norwegian home cooking style reflects a more modest story compared to restaurants. Here lunch bags (matpakker) with "sweaty cheese and soggy cucumber", as well as "half-baked baguettes with poor quality ham and lumps of butter" is not uncommon, providing a different picture from the careful food displays in restaurant settings. Semi-prepared food, such as pizza, pasta and porridge are common ingredients in a home-made weekday dinner. As one of the chefs interviewed stated: "The food nation Norway is on a really, really, really, great path. It's not as great at home, where it's on the edge of a cliff". This, on the one hand, represents the gap between a world-class professional scene and a domestic culture still largely built around convenience and habit, is not a contradiction so much as a defining feature of Norwegian food culture right now. On the other hand, this clearly demonstrates that Norwegians tend to perceive home-cooked food as primarily functional, in contrast to the hedonic and experiential value they associate with restaurant, or even their own weekend homemade dining. The question is whether the revolution happening in restaurant kitchens is slowly migrating into homes, and if so, how.

There is a fascinating gap between the public's deep interest in chefs, their books, television shows, and personal

stories, and the reality of everyday home cooking. While weekday meals are often shaped by habit and convenience, weekend cooking tends to invite more time, creativity, and inspiration. Many Norwegians, for instance, take pride in preparing ambitious meals on weekends, drawing on the techniques and ideas of professional chefs.

At the same time, the rise of high-quality restaurants and workplace canteens, where trained chefs and modern food concepts are central, are reshaping how people understand their own food culture. These encounters influence not just what people eat, but how they think about ingredients, preparation, and presentation.

As restaurant visits become more common, and as the diversity and number of restaurants continue to grow, the interaction between curious diners and knowledgeable chefs also deepens. This growing exchange is quietly transforming the public's food literacy, not just in terms of what is cooked at home, but in how food is valued, interpreted, and shared.

In addition to the direct visual display and images of traditional and modern food, Norwegian eating experiences also evoke images of nature and agricultural landscapes. People picture images of "lots of cows grazing in pastoral landscape", gardens with "apple trees, red raspberries, and new vegetables", "intensely green mountains" and "cold, clear sea", all marvellous landscapes that shift beautifully with the seasons. Furthermore, the visual of social aspect also takes play in the Norwegian eating experience as people often recall the image of social gathering and sharing food with each other.

*Sound*

Sound is also reported as a subtle part of Norwegian eating experience, evoking both natural and human-made soundscapes. These soundscapes reflect the country's unique environment as well the Nordic lifestyle.

Natural soundscapes such as waterfalls, rustling trees, the

low frequency sound of the sea and sheep bleating are all sounds imagined when thinking about Norwegian food experiences. Both biosphere and geosphere soundscapes from typical Norwegian animals, plants, landscapes, and climate come to mind, constituting a unique eating experience. The diverse geosphere and biosphere enrich the auditory aspect. The silence of a cold snowy landscape on a clear blue day triggering the expectation of gathering by the cottage fire with warm chocolate and waffles with brown cheese, jam and sour cream. The wild winter storms along the coast, harsh outdoor environments that provide plenty of reason to dream of a warming stew or soup. The sounds of fisher boats, the lively harbours, the sounds of tractors ploughing or harvesting crops. These sounds are closely connected with natural and seasonal conditions, evoking a blend of food images.

Alongside the ecological sound of nature, there are also recognized culinary and social sounds in the Norwegian eating experience. For instance, people might recognize food "boiling and simmering", "sounds of a knife sliding easily through over cooked food", "the buzz-like sound around the table" and the ambient "jazz music". However, not all sounds are captivating. While sounds from nice chats with families or friends are appreciated, the minimalistic trend of Scandinavian design where "there are no curtains, no tablecloth, just the hard surfaces, and no sound attenuation" creates noise and less pleasant experiences. As one of the chefs stated: "people talk louder and louder, so the noise level becomes higher and higher, and the evening is not really pleasant anymore".

*Smell*

> "It's something about the smell of soil and plants. There is something about walking in the forest in the autumn and smelling the blueberries and the mullets and all the good smells. So, its nature, it is all the sensory impressions. Being out on the lake in the summer Putting out fishing nets and experiencing the smell of the boat, the

> lake, and the fish equipment. The nature, the fact that you can smell it, that is what I like very, very much". (Norwegian researcher)

Aroma is one of the most important aspects of the eating experiences. . Imagining the Norwegian eating experience brings forward smells of the forest where the berries are picked, and the smells of the sea where the fish are caught. The smell of "salt, sea, and rotten seaweed along the coastline", "the smell of fresh fish", "the smell of the tomatoes and the vegetables from the greenhouse", "the smell of the flowers of apple trees and berry bushes" are all associations that comes to mind.

Not only the natural aromas, but also indoor scents of food preparation remind Norwegians of their specific eating experiences. Preparing food in a house with closed windows due to the cold temperature outside, makes the whole kitchen and sometimes the whole apartment smell of food, often reminding people of the eating memories, bringing forward a sense of nostalgia. Meat and onions pan-fried in butter, and boiled fish are familiar smells for many Norwegians. "When fish is steamed it creates a smell that feels warm, kind of a warm and pleasant smell that I grew up with. The smell goes everywhere. Butter and salmon give off a slightly peculiar smell. And we use a lot of butter". Norwegians associate the smell from "pan-fried meat that let go of the fat", "boiled vegetables" and "steamed fish", as well as smells from preparing taco spiced minced meat, chicken, fårikål, ribbe and pinnekjøtt, as typical smells from the Norwegian kitchen.

Furthermore, ambient smells add another layer to the experience. For example, the ambient smell from candles and burning birch wood from the fireplace also comes to mind. "The smell of birch, mountain birch, it's a special smell when the fire is made with birch. I have that smell of Røros in my nose, this birch smell that is constant, throughout the winter when they use birch as firewood".

*Taste*

Taste is by far the most important criterion in professional chef competitions like Bocuse d'Or in which Norway is an overall leading nation in terms of medals since 1987, and respect for taste runs deep in chef communities and restaurants. As the saying goes: "It can look and feel as good as you like, but without taste, it all falls apart."

When chefs speak of respecting ingredients, their highest form of respect is revealed through the curating of the ingredient's natural "own" taste, whether modest or strong. This value shapes how chefs talk about food, and gradually, it influences how people think about ingredients more broadly. In Norway, the growing awareness of taste as a core quality is shifting public expectations. If a dish's main ingredient is overpowered and concealed by spices and sauces, it's seen, in professional kitchens, as a failure to honour the ingredients unique properties and value.

Norwegian eating experiences have two very distinct taste images: the tradition and the modern. The traditional food that is perceived "salty", "fatty", "soft" and "rough working-class" food with a "greasy and thick sauce", and the modern cuisine that is "fresh", crispy", "clean flavoured", "minimally processed", and "lean". This distinction of taste comes from different methods to prepare and preserve food. While the traditional kitchen has tastes influenced by traditional preservation techniques such as salt and smoke, the modern Norwegian kitchen is all about keeping the fresh and pure flavour of the raw material, "a grouse should taste like a grouse, and a lobster should taste like a lobster".

> "In the old [traditional food] there is a lot of salt, a lot of smoke… it is preserved food, food where you have used a preservation technique that you needed to preserve the food before the refrigerator arrived. So that's the first thing I associate with the traditional food. In the

> modern kitchen,... then it's really the local ingredients and how they are interpreted food-wise that I think about. And then suddenly you are served a milk that has been boiled and if you take the protein rich milk skin off and whisk it, it provide a unique taste that you can use in the dish. Such microinventions are a bit like "wow, that's so cool". You use produce and food preparation methods we have from the old days, interpret them and use them in new ways. Both are present, modern ways grow out of the old ways [today]. (Norwegian chef and food producer)

Spices do also vary significantly between these two. While the modern cuisine uses spices from all over the world, the traditional kitchen uses first and foremost more simple seasoning such as salt and pepper, or locally available ingredients such as freshly cut parsley on the potatoes. Lemons and vinegar marinated cucumber salads do also often follow traditional Norwegian fish dishes. However, there is also similarity besides the striking contrast. For example, the emphasis on the prominent taste of seafood in both traditional and modern cuisine. The good access to top quality seafood in Norway brings also forward an association to "a gentle little touch of fresh sea flavour for fish, crayfish and scallops". This is something both the traditional and the modern Norwegian eating experience have in common.

A pool of seafood flavours exists, from pure and fresh, minimally processed at one end of the scale to flavour intense from fermentation and salting at the other. Both coexist. This coexistence is arguably what defines Norwegian food identity more than any single dish or technique. Unlike French cuisine, which resolved toward refinement, or American food culture, which largely resolved toward convenience, Norwegian food culture holds both poles simultaneously, the intensely preserved and the intensely fresh, without needing to choose between them. That tension is productive, not unresolved.

# 4 NORWAY'S RESTAURANT FRONTIER: EXPLORING THE PERKS OF NOVEL DINING EXPERIENCES

Norway, a rocky, cold, and long stretched country, way north in Europe. A country with 28 953 km of coastline, high mountains, and deep fjords, from Lindesnes in the south to North Cape in the north; with Polar nights and midnight sun and where the nearly six million inhabitants are grateful for the Gulf stream. Norway has plenty of sheep, reindeer, moose, mushrooms, berries, fresh and tasty seafood and much more fish than a small country can manage to eat, and a long history of explorers (the Vikings "visited" both Istanbul, Paris and the East coast of America from the 9th century, and drilling offshore made the country very rich when the oil and gas was found in the late 1960s).

## Norway's restaurant frontiers

In this country we can find some remarkably interesting

restaurants and some of the best chefs in the world. In the world championship of culinary art, Bocuse d'Or, that always takes place in Lyon, France every second year (first time in 1987), no country has won more medals than Norway (five gold, four silver and four bronzes as per 2025). Norway has even gotten more medals than France, which often is perceived to be the culinary centre of the world. The winning chefs come from different parts of the country, and often smaller remote places like Lom, Moss, Tønsberg, Sandefjord, Arendal, Sandnes, Austevoll, Fitjar, Steigen, etc. with training at the best restaurants in Oslo, Stavanger and abroad. They create tasty food art out of different local ingredients (such as halibut, cod, lamb, potatoes, turnips, flowers and herbs).

In 2024, the bi-annual European qualification to Bocuse d'Or 2025 took place in Trondheim, Norway. The ingredients that were selected as mandatory for all countries for the two dishes the teams presented to the jury was Skrei (arctic cod), live, hand gathered scallops from Frøya, tørrfisk from Lofoten (dried cod, stoccafisso), top round tongue and shank from reindeer and LINIE aquavit, a traditional spirit based on potato (see Figure 4.1)

Figure 4.1. Artistic decorated Norwegian fish plates presented by Team Norway at Bocuse d'Or World final in 2023 and European final 2024. Photo credit: Filip A. Bendi – BOC 2023, Photo Tom Haga Håvard Werkland-BOC 2024, Photo Tom Haga.

Over the past decades, chef competitions like the Bocuse d'Or have been crucial in elevating the quality and development of Norway's restaurant sector. These competitions have served as catalysts for innovation, professional growth, and international recognition. Norwegian chefs' consistent success in the Bocuse d'Or has showcased their culinary prowess as well as highlighted Norway's rich gastronomic heritage and commitment to excellence. The rigorous preparation and high standards demanded by such competitions have fostered a culture of continuous improvement and creativity within Norwegian professional kitchens. Moreover, the visibility and prestige associated with these events have attracted culinary tourism, positioning Norway as a European food destination. Crucially, this transformation was not state-directed.

Unlike Denmark, where New Nordic cuisine benefited from institutional support and the global platform of Noma, Norwegian chefs drove change themselves, through

competitions, through relationships with local producers, and through a collective sense of ownership over what Norwegian food could become. The result is a culinary culture with unusually strong roots precisely because it was not handed down from above.

The relationship between competitive culinary excellence and the restaurant industry's evolution underscores the transformative impact of chef competitions on Norway's gastronomic landscape (https://norskgastronomi.no/). In 1987 there were few restaurants to work and train at for ambitious chefs, and competitions were the key arena for developing crucial skills and a proper Norwegian gastronomy. Today the restaurant landscape is wildly different, and the flow of ideas and talents between quality kitchens and serious competitions proves to be a healthy innovation tandem for evolution and quality of the country's fast growing restaurant sector (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Number of active restaurants in Norway 2004-2023 (Menon, 2025). Source: Jakobsen et al. (2025).

**A culinary revolution**

There seem to be a culinary revolution taking place in Norway now. Things have really changed since one of the authors grew up in the 1970s (Nina Veflen), when the restaurants her family visited a few Sundays a year, offered traditional meals such as meat balls in brown sauce and fish balls in white sauce (a very white dish that sometimes were made more exotic with a dash of yellow curry), both with potatoes. Almost all dinners contained boiled potatoes then, many Norwegian elders still claim that 'if there is no potato, it is not dinner', and the first time a friend of Veflen got spaghetti at home, it was served with potatoes (Figure 4.3). On special occasions, like Christmas eve, a fine layer of fresh parsley decorated the potatoes. But even when decorated, her childhoods potato had no resemblance with what the leading chefs in Norway can do with the potato today.

Figure 4.3. Potatoes in different shapes. Photo credit: Matprat/Synøve Dreyer, Aleksander L. Vartdal – ÅK 2023, Photo Tom Haga, Jordens_Gull_1_Håvard_Werkland, Photo Berre

Lately, Michelin stars have sparkled over the culinary Norway. In 2016 Maaemo, as the first restaurant in Norway, got three out of three possible stars in the prestigious guide. In 2020 the world's largest under water restaurant, Under, that opened on the southern tip of Norway Lindesnes the year before, got its first star. In 2024 restaurant RENAA in Stavanger received its third star, and Kontrast in Oslo it's second, and Norway in 2024 counts 25 Michelin starred restaurants in total (see Figure 4.4). Michelin stars are important, but to really understand how dynamic the restaurant scene of today is one need to look underneath the stars. The European guide Falstaff identified in 2024 130 restaurants from Tromsø in the north to Grimstad in the south of significant quality food, wine and atmosphere, thus receiving from one to four forks in that year's comprehensive guide (Falstaff, 2024).

This aligns closely with the core values of Norwegian chefs: inclusion through transparency and sharing. The focus is on the making of the food itself, not the chef as a star. Grounded understanding, however, requires experience, and becoming a leading chef takes time. The starting points for understanding are nature's variety, the lessons of a harsh climate and lean

times, and the general openness that comes from a culture of being a small, trade-based nation in a big world.

When curiosity and pride in local ingredients meet a culinary mindset unbound by rigid traditions and strict hierarchical organization, the result is innovation at every level. It is within such cultural framework Norwegian gastronomy is taking shape, not as a fixed canon, but as a shared, inspired movement unfolding right now, in and around the industry.

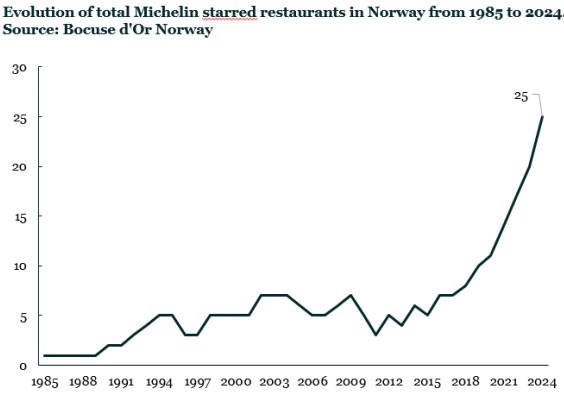


Figure 4.4. Evolution of total Michelin starred restaurant in Norway from 1985 to 2024. (Menon, 2025) Source: Jakobsen et al. (2025).

**Norwegian food culture**

According to Innovation Norway, global food enthusiasts describe the Norwegian kitchen as fresh, witty, and unpretentious, with an excellent local food culture that utilizes the unique access to fresh seafood and other Norwegian produce to create flavours that vary with the season.

To secure enough food for the winter when nothing grows in Norway, and for periods when the weather is too tough for fishing, processing techniques as salting, drying, freezing, smoking, and canning has long traditions in Norway. These techniques and the food that follows from them, like salted

and dried cod (bacalao), salted and dried "cured" ham (Spekeskinke), and different kinds of jam (Cloudberry, lingonberry, blueberry etc.) are today utilized by the gourmet chefs to make creative and novel meals. Norwegian modern chefs describe their raw materials as either hyper fresh and seasonal, like handpicked blueberries from a forest nearby (summer), lamb that has been grazing freely in the mountains all summer (and autumn), fish and seafood caught the same day in 4 degree-fresh water (winter) and fresh herbs and flowers from their gardens (spring), or heavily processed, like cured ham, bacalao, smoked reindeer, cloudberry jam etc.

There is nothing in between. Either hyper fresh or preserved, often by traditional methods like curing, salting, smoking, fermenting and drying, and modern-to-Norway "faster" techniques like fermentation into flavourful soy-like sauces. These hyper fresh foods that nature offers at specific times of the year are combined with traditional preserved foods, to some very innovative and interesting dishes (e.g., fresh reindeer meat with fermented brussels sprouts and pickled mushrooms). Traditionally Norwegians consumed what they managed to eat there and then of the fresh produce, but at the same time preserved the excess for later consumption in less fertile seasons. To survive the long and cold winter, preparing food for storage was necessary. Today the forward leaning chefs often combine local and seasonal fresh produce with products they themselves dried, smoked or salted in the prior seasons when access to fresh was abundant.

The Norwegian kitchen is also very regional. The long fjords and the deep valleys have not only led to different dialects. Also, regional food cultures have emerged. These food cultures are more place-bound than in most other countries in Europe, and different regions have different food traditions. Up north in Vesterålen and Lofoten there are strong traditions for how and when to serve the arctic cod (steamed cod is served with liver, row, melted butter and boiled potatoes and carrots, only in January-March), while in Northern Trøndelag "trøndersodden", a soup with small meat

balls, broth and small cubes of root vegetables is served at weddings and other special occasions. These are two out of many examples of regional food cultures in Norway. These regional food cultures open an avenue of new possibilities for food innovations, for instance by fusing them with inspiration from the global kitchen.

| **Norwegian Modern Chefs Food Philosophy Reflections** |
| --- |
| **Chef 1_Clean and good quality:**<br><br>We should be proud of the Norwegian produce. We have a lot of good ingredients, especially fish and shellfish. We have a lot of clean, great produce. |
| **Chef 2_Natures kitchen**:<br><br>A food experience in Norway is about the connection between our time and nature's time. It is different [from food experiences in other countries] because we have a different nature, and we have a completely different agriculture, and we have a completely different structure of how we have created our society. We have a nature that changes from one part of the country to the next and from region to region, and we also have four seasons. |
| **Chef 3_Traditions with innovation**:<br><br>Norwegians are still very proud of what we produce ourselves, Norwegian ingredients for example, “tørrfisk” (dried fish). The food traditions that we have, the ones from the old days, like, herring and potatoes. What was Norway's first export product? Of course, it was the arctic cod and the bacalao.<br><br>There has been an absolutely incredible development in recent years in both food availability and concepts and of different cuisines available. You can eat dim sum and sushi every day. Most people today eat a mixture of traditional dishes (like fiskeboller and kjøttkaker), and vary it with cuisines from the world, e.g.the typical Norwegian version of [Friday] taco. |
| **Chef 4_Place-bound, fresh and fermented:**<br><br>I think it's the word "place-bound". Just as the dialects in Norway are incredibly distinct and respected, you get to keep your dialect, while in Sweden you have traditional food that applies to the whole country, but in Norway, they are more distinct from the various areas. It is really only in parts of Italy and parts of France where I have experienced the same type of clear distinctness in each individual region.<br><br>... the influence of eating fresh food when it's in season and then fermenting it for when it's not in season. So, either it's super fresh, or it's salted and |

| |
|---|
| fermented, so you kind of don't have that middle ground. Either it is hyper-fresh or fermented. And I think what we repeatedly see is, also among leading chefs today, that fermented ingredients are served in combination with the fresh. |
| **Chef 5_Simple, solid, and trustworthy:**<br><br>I'm from the North, where it's a bit simple, solid and trustworthy food. It's very much fish and potato or meat. Potato centred. When I was a child there were few vegetables to get hold of, so you ate the ones you grew yourself. There were carrots and potatoes and a lot of root vegetables and the like. Now there is a large selection of all kinds of food. |
| **The Norwegian food philosophy:** to serve seasonal, place-bound, clean, and simple traditional food with an innovative twist. It combines hyper-fresh seasonal raw materials with traditionally processed food in a new way. It is inspired by Norwegian nature, climate, and regional food cultures. |

## Imagine a novel Norwegian dining experience

To get a peek into the frontiers of Norway's restaurant frontier, close your eyes and vision the smell of salt water and tar, feel the fresh wind in your hair and feel the heat from the burning fireplace. Open your eyes and see the colour explosion on your plate, pees green as an early spring, beets as red as only red beets can be, and all decorated with colourful flowers. Take a bite and taste the natural flavour. Your lobster tastes like a lobster, your carrot taste nothing else than a carrot. But then suddenly you get an explosion of something salty and fatty from a sauce a bit hard to detect. Your fingers touch the wooden plate and the iron fork. Your lips touch the rough crystal glass, and you feel the refreshing dry apple cider taste from Hardanger that fits so perfect to the meal. Norwegian cuisine has come a long way. Brilliant chefs inspired by Norwegian traditions, local nature, and the international kitchen has lifted the Norwegian cuisine to a new level. And this is only the beginning.

# 5 UNLEASHING THE MULTISENSORY MAGIC OF EATING EXPERIENCES IN THE NORTH OF NORWAY

Imagine dining under the enchanting northern lights, surrounded by vast snowy landscapes and immersed in a rich cultural heritage of intertwined cultures. Food experiences are not only about taste but encompass a symphony of sensory elements that come together to shape our perceptions and enjoyment of what we eat. Although much research has focused on the intrinsic and extrinsic factors of food experiences, most studies have been conducted in urban areas and among specific demographics. This leaves us with limited knowledge of how diverse cultural and environmental contexts influence our multisensory eating experiences.

In this chapter, we embark on a journey to the Arctic region of Norway, a land of marked seasonal changes, unique atmospheric features, and local communities with rich cultural traditions, including the indigenous Sámi people. Based on a recent exploratory article on multisensory experiences in Northern Norway (Tran et al., 2024), we aim to explore how the combination of sensory stimuli, cultural influences, and

environmental factors intertwine to create a unique and captivating food experience in this distinct region.

Figure 5.1 presents a contextual framework for understanding multisensory food experiences in Northern Norway, structured around four interrelated dimensions: experience elements, bipolar concepts, sensory stories, and values. The framework visually organises how sensory characteristics emerge from natural (plants, animals, inanimate objects) and cultural sources, while also capturing the tensions and contrasts in experience design, such as Sámi versus Norwegian traditions or light versus dark settings. Sensory stories contextualise these elements through narrative practices that enrich the overall experience. Values, such as simplicity, sustainability, and locality, anchor these practices within broader sociocultural priorities. This integrated model elucidates how environmental, cultural, and sensorial components collectively shape distinctive gastronomic experiences in Arctic settings.

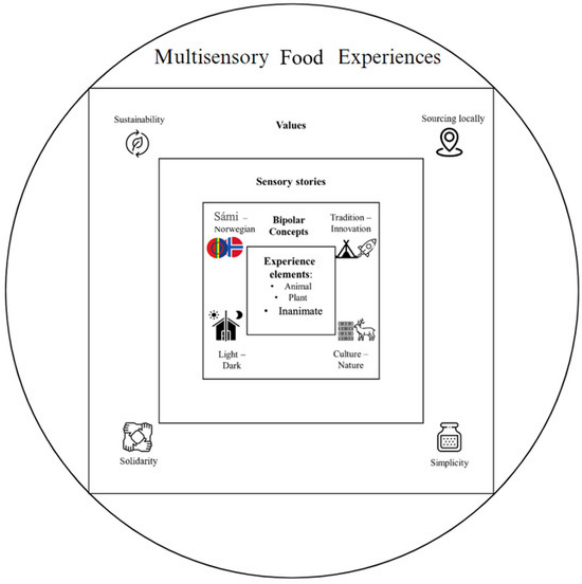


Figure 5.1. A contextual framework of the multisensory food experience in the north of Norway. Reproduced from Tran, H., Veflen, N., Jørgensen, E. J. B., & Velasco, C. (2024). *Multisensory food experiences in Northern Norway: An exploratory study*. *Foods*, 13(13), 2156. https://doi.org/10.3390/foods13132156, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons CC BY 4.0.

**Sensory elements of the Arctic food experience**

The Arctic region of Norway offers a rich and diverse array of sensory elements derived from its characteristic natural environment and culinary traditions. Experience elements are the building blocks of sensory experiences, originating from plants, animals, and non-animate objects (Figure 5.2). From the vibrant colours of fresh vegetables and aromatic herbs to the sound of crackling wood and the feel of animal-based materials, every element contributes to the overall multisensory experience.

Figure 5.2. An example collage of photos taken during the research. Reproduced from Tran, H., Veflen, N., Jørgensen, E. J. B., & Velasco, C. (2024). *Multisensory food experiences in Northern Norway: An exploratory study*. *Foods*, 13(13), 2156. https://doi.org/10.3390/foods13132156, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license.

The concept of Sámi vs. Norwegian traditions represents a fascinating contrast in the sensory elements used to craft food experiences. The Sámi, an indigenous community residing in the northern Arctic regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, possess a distinct language, maintain ancient practices such as reindeer herding, and have a profound connection with their ancestral territories. The Sámi component may reflect indigenous traditions and the Arctic surroundings, while the Norwegian influence offers a different sensory palette. This interplay creates a balance between local authenticity and broader Norwegian culinary trends, resulting in diverse and enriching experiences.

The dynamic between tradition vs. innovation showcases how traditional culinary practices coexist with innovative approaches, including fusion cuisine and experimental techniques. By balancing familiarity and novelty, chefs can create unique sensory experiences that honour their heritage while embracing modern culinary advancements.

Light vs. dark is a sensory dimension deeply rooted in the seasonal changes of the Arctic. Whether it's the brightness of the midnight sun during summer or the darkness of the prolonged winter nights, these contrasting experiences play a vital role in shaping the overall ambiance and sensory perceptions during meals.

Cultural vs. natural elements represent the delicate balance between culinary practices and the inherent qualities of ingredients and the environment. Culturally influenced flavours, spices, and cooking techniques harmonize with the natural terroir of the region, creating a sensory interplay that celebrates both culture and nature.

**Enriching with sensory stories**

Food experiences in the Arctic North of Norway are embedded in sensory stories that enrich the overall encounter. These narratives can be personal anecdotes, cultural traditions, or historical accounts that evoke emotions and memories, enhancing the appreciation of the culinary context. For instance, the tale of trying a meal on a winter night under the bright northern lights creates a profound connection between the diner and the experience.

**Guided by core values**

The overarching values that guide food experiences in the Arctic North of Norway play a pivotal role in shaping preferences and perceptions. The focus on the local is a central principle, emphasizing locally sourced ingredients and cultural elements to celebrate the region's identity. Sustainability is another key value that fosters a balanced relationship between people and nature, ensuring a responsible approach to culinary practices that respect the environment. The value of contrast adds variety and excitement to sensory experiences, offering a delightful mix of sensory elements that engage and captivate diners. Finally, simplicity embodies a principle that highlights clarity and minimalism, allowing the essential sensory qualities

to shine and providing uncluttered and focused dining experiences.

These four values do not exist in isolation from what the rest of this book documents. They map directly onto the sensory patterns identified in Chapters 2 and 3: the seasonal colour associations, the tension between preserved and fresh, the regional specificity of Norwegian food traditions, and the minimalist aesthetic of modern Norwegian restaurant cuisine. The Arctic north makes these values visible in their most concentrated form because the environmental conditions are most extreme, but they are present across Norwegian food culture as a whole.

**Final remarks**

Our sensory story through the Arctic North of Norway unveils a captivating world of multisensory food experiences. From the sensory elements derived from plants, animals, and non-animate objects to the interplay between Sámi and Norwegian traditions, each element contributes to a unique and enriching encounter.

Sensory stories add depth and meaning to these experiences, while core values of focusing on the local, sustainability, contrast, and simplicity guide the formation of these culinary delights.

As we immerse ourselves in this sensory symphony, we gain a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of sensory stimuli, cultural heritage, and the environment in shaping our multisensory eating experiences.

# 6 CONCLUSIONS

This book illuminates the rich and multifaceted nature of multisensory eating experiences in Norway, framed through the lens of seasonality, regional culinary traditions, and sensory design. From the first edible spring plants and vegetables to the comfort foods of the dark winters, Norwegian gastronomy unfolds as a deeply situated and dynamic interplay of nature, culture, and perception. We have shown how each sense, sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, interacts with environmental and socio-cultural elements to co-construct the experience of eating, often in ways that extend beyond the plate and into memory, emotion, and identity.

In attending to both historical continuities and recent innovations, we observed how Norwegian food culture draws simultaneously from a past of subsistence and a present of abundance. Traditional preservation techniques, such as fermenting, curing, and drying, continue to shape today's flavour profiles and textural expectations, while modern culinary practices reinterpret these with aesthetic and experiential intentionality. A growing sense of self-awareness, inspiration, and hunger for knowledge has fuelled a shift

toward experiences that are both rooted in place and open to global influence, guided by provenance, sensory storytelling, and sustainability.

The New Nordic movement was undoubtedly important to Noma, as it functioned less as a rigid framework and more as a set of guiding values. In practice, these values operated as a catalyst, at times releasing creativity and at other times introducing constraints that chefs had to negotiate. In the Norwegian context, however, New Nordic Cuisine has never solidified into a clearly bounded "thing." It is better understood as a kind of charter of choice, an orientation rather than an identity. Many Norwegian chefs resist being labelled as "Nordic," even if they are willing to accept the term for its advantages in terms of visibility and brand recognition.

Crucially, the New Nordic Charter itself did not create the movement in any direct sense. What emerged did so through the practices of chefs and farmers, shaped by their relationships to ingredients, producers, and markets. Unlike in some other national contexts, there was no strong state apparatus actively subsidising or promoting a particular culinary perspective within restaurants. Instead, the development of what is now associated with New Nordic Cuisine in Norway has been largely endogenous. It has been created, refined, and sustained by chefs themselves, resulting in a pronounced sense of ownership. This collective ownership has, in turn, generated the momentum necessary to support a transformation of considerable scale, one that underpins the changes we now observe and discuss.

What the FoodLessons research ultimately reveals is that Norwegian gastronomy's strength comes not from a single movement or institution but from a distributed, chef-led transformation grounded in place, season, and material. New Nordic provided a vocabulary; Norwegian chefs provided the content. Few Norwegian chefs willingly carry the Nordic label, yet they collectively produced the change that label is credited with. That distinction matters.

The inclusion of Northern Norway and Sámi culinary traditions further revealed the importance of contextual specificity in multisensory research. Here, food is not merely consumed but narrated, performed, and ritualised against a backdrop of light and darkness, silence and storm. The sensory frameworks developed through empirical fieldwork underscored the importance of local knowledge systems, the materiality of natural and inanimate elements, and the tensions and synergies between tradition and innovation. These insights offer a broader methodological and theoretical contribution to the study of food experiences in specific contexts, suggesting that understanding gastronomy demands immersion into its ecological, cultural, and temporal textures.

Taken together, the insights from FoodLessons offer a conceptual and practical foundation for researchers, designers, and practitioners interested in the experiential dimensions of food. As sensory experiences increasingly become a site of cultural expression, identity negotiation, and innovation, understanding the mechanisms and meanings of multisensory eating becomes ever more relevant. Norway, with its deep connection to seasonality, resourcefulness, and nature-bound traditions, provides a compelling setting for reimagining the role of food not only as sustenance, but as a medium through which people engage with the world around them.

## Looking into the future

The future of multisensory eating experiences in Norway seems set for considerable growth and creativity. As Norwegian cuisine continues to evolve, the focus on merging local traditions with international culinary trends suggests a fertile landscape for developing more immersive and sensory-rich dining experiences. The cultural appreciation for the distinctive Norwegian landscape, characterised by its expansive coastlines, dense forests, and pronounced seasonal variations, provides a natural palette from which chefs are likely to draw inspiration. This connection to nature and place, coupled with Norway's growing reputation on the global

culinary stage, as highlighted by successes in competitions like the Bocuse d'Or, prepares the groundwork for a cuisine that celebrates local ingredients whilst delivering them through novel sensory experiences.

Innovations in the restaurant industry, underscore a trend towards creating environments where diners can not only taste but also feel, see, and smell the essence of Norway. The increasing emphasis on sustainability and the traceability of ingredients is likely to enhance the authenticity of the dining experience, allowing eaters to engage with the story of their food from source to plate. Moreover, the integration of technology and art in meal presentation and ambiance could further amplify the sensory elements of dining, transforming each meal from mere sustenance into a celebration of Norwegian culture and innovation.

The more pressing question is whether the sensory richness documented here, in seasonal associations, regional traditions, and Arctic food narratives, can be made legible to international audiences without being flattened into a generic Nordic brand. That is the challenge facing Norwegian gastronomy, and it is as much a cultural as a culinary one.

# ENDNOTES

Endnote 1: Images included in the figure are: Red – Tumble of strawberries (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/157643364), raw red meat cuts (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/1164147716), ripe cranberries (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/2159315502); Orange – Salmon fillet (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/125537384), cloudberries in wooden mug (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/1335272464), sliced organic carrots (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/2150710300); Yellow – Raw potatoes with slices (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/496359598), kantarell mushrooms (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/1202970642), cracked and whole egg (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/168353893); Green – Apple background

(https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/478157668), young cabbage (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/544313316), parsley (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/92002655); Blue – Blueberries (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/97129133), blackberries (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/160585839), mussels close-up (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/93254025); Indigo – Fermented red cabbage (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/2190576511), red onions (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/171158822), smoked horse meat (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/2201330092); Violet – Sliced red cabbage (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/914493486), lilac flowers (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/104297953), purple asparagus with chive flowers (https://summer.gettyimages.no/detail/photo/1473450010).

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